

Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SIG-03 DOE-15 SOE-02
AGRE-00 EB-08 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
HEW-04 COME-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /119 R

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P R 142245Z JUL 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY CAIRO

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 178299

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT MR

SUBJECT: MAURITANIAN AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON AF ASSISTANT
SECRETARY

1. SUMMARY: ON JULY 10 MAURITANIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S.
NASSIM KOCHMAN, ACCOMPANIED BY EMBASSY COUNSELOR FOR
POLITICAL AFFAIRS, REQUESTED A MEETING WITH AF ASSISTANT
SECRETARY MOOSE. AF/W DIRECTOR AND COUNTRY OFFICER ALSO
ATTENDED. KOCHMAN DISCUSSED MAURITANIA'S COUP D'ETAT
AND U.S.-MAURITANIA POLITICAL/ECONOMIC/CULTURAL COOPERA-
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TION.

2. KOCHMAN BEGAN BY ASKING WHAT INFORMATION WE HAD ON THE
NEW SITUATION IN MAURITANIA. WHEN TOLD OUR INFORMATION WAS
VERY SKETCHY, KOCHMAN GAVE HIS ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION.
HE SAID HE HAD RECENTLY SPENT SEVERAL DAYS IN MAURITANIA
IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH EX-PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH. HE SAID

THAT THE MILITARY COUP D'ETAT CAME AS A COMPLETE SURPRISE TO HIM. HE NOTED THAT HE WAS NOT VERY HAPPY WITH THE CHANGE BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT RESPECT FOR OULD DADDAH. KOCHMAN SAID HE BELIEVED OULD DADDAH WAS A TRUE PATRIOT. HE ADDED THAT CONTRARY TO REPORTS FROM PARIS AND RABAT, THE COUP D'ETAT DID NOT OCCUR BECAUSE THERE WAS NO FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN MAURITANIA OR BECAUSE OF THE CORRUPTION. ACCORDING TO HIM PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH WAS AN HONEST LEADER AND A GREAT SUPPORTER OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH. IN FACT, KOCHMAN SAID THERE WAS TOO MUCH FREEDOM IN MAURITANIA. HE SAID THAT WHEN A NATION IS INVOLVED IN A NATIONAL STRUGGLE SUCH AS IN THE WESTERN SAHARA THERE CAN SOMETIMES BE TOO MUCH FREEDOM.

3. KOCHMAN BELIEVES THAT THE REAL REASON OULD DADDAH WAS DEPOSED WAS THAT HE DID NOT PAY ENOUGH ATTENTION TO MAURITANIA'S ECONOMIC SITUATION AND THAT HE DELEGATED TOO MUCH RESPONSIBILITY FOR ECONOMIC DECISIONS TO INCOMPETENT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. KOCHMAN CITED THE SUGAR REFINERY PROJECT AND OIL REFINING PROJECT AS EXAMPLES OF VERY UNSOUND ECONOMIC DECISIONS ON THE PART OF GIRM. HE THOUGHT THAT THE MAURITANIANS HAD BECOME FED UP WITH STATE RUN ENTERPRISES THAT WERE MISMANAGED AND UNPRODUCTIVE. ECONOMIC MISMANAGEMENT AND MAURITANIA'S LACK OF SUCCESS AGAINST THE POLISARIO WERE PROBABLY THE PRINCIPAL ISSUES THAT BROUGHT DOWN THE FORMER REGIME. HE SAID HE HAD EXPLAINED TO THE

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GIRM U.S. POLICY REGARDING SUPPORT FOR U.S. FIRMS ABROAD AND HAD EMPHASIZED THAT SUPPORT DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT. NEVERTHELESS, HE SAID IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF THE UNITED STATES SHOWED A GREATER INTEREST IN SEEING THAT THE SUGAR REFINERY SUCCEEDED.

4. KOCHMAN CONFIRMED EMBASSY REPORTING THAT THE COUP WAS LED BY LT. COL. MOUSTAPHA OULD MOHAMED SALEK AND LT. COL. CHEIKH OULD BOIDE. HE SAID SALEK HAD ONCE SERVED AS AID DE CAMP TO OULD DADDAH. HE SAID THAT THE MAURITANIA GOVERNMENT WAS NOW BEING GOVERNED BY A MILITARY RECOVERY COMMITTEE COMPRISED OF MILITARY AND GENDARMARIE OFFICIALS LED BY LT. COL. SALEK. ACCORDING TO KOCHMAN, THE MILITARY OFFICERS NOW GOVERNING MAURITANIA WERE PRO-WESTERN AND WOULD NOT ALTER MAURITANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY, PARTICULARLY POLICY TOWARD FRANCE AND MOROCCO.

5. ON THE POLISARIO, KOCHMAN WAS VERY VAGUE. HE SAID THAT HE DID NOT THINK THAT THE PRESENT MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD RENOUNCE ANY OF ITS TERRITORIAL CLAIMS TO THE WESTERN SAHARA. HOWEVER, HE SAID THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAR.

6. KOCHMAN SAID THE U.S. GOVERNMENT CANNOT BE NEUTRAL ON THE WESTERN SAHARA. HE SAID MAURITANIA WAS OF BOTH POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S. AND THAT THE U.S. MUST DEVELOP A POLICY THAT WOULD REFLECT MAURITANIA'S IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S. HE CALLED FOR CLOSER ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COOPERATION WITH MAURITANIA. HE THOUGHT SUCH COOPERATION WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO

ASSURE THAT THE NEW REGIME RETAINED ITS PRESENT PRO-WESTERN ORIENTATION. IN THIS REGARD, KOCHMAN SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE A U.S./MAURITANIAN CULTURAL AGREEMENT THAT WOULD ALLOW MORE MAURITANIAN STUDENTS TO STUDY IN THE U.S.

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4. ASSISTANT SECRETARY MOOSE THANKED AMBASSADOR KOCHMAN FOR HIS ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN MAURITANIA AND HE EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT ALL WOULD GO WELL FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT AND THAT DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WOULD REMAIN STEADY AND CONSTRUCTIVE BETWEEN THE U.S. AND MAURITANIA. IN RESPONSE TO KOCHMAN'S QUESTION, HE SAID HE WOULD CONSIDER HIS PREVIOUSLY STATED INTENTION TO VISIT MAURITANIA IN LIGHT OF THE RECENT CHANGE IN THE MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT. CHRISTOPHER

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